The IDLER

Public Occurrences, Comment, Excursions & Rational Entertainment

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Flotsam & Jetsam

PRESS REPORTS INDICATE that there's absolutely no chance Lyndon won't be renominated. Which means that there will be a lot of Democrats voting for a man they don't want so that he can continue a war they don't want and, as a result, not have enough money to carry out the programs they do want. With that sort of thing going on, we should expect to see the rise of a flagellant cult within the party any day now.

□

THE AMERICANS FOR Democratic Action met here recently and decided that it perhaps didn't care too much for LBJ and some of his actions, but it was too early to tell. It deferred that matter until it could be determined whether that noted quadrennial, lyndonus liberalus, would bloom again this spring.

□

WITH THE DEMOCRATS moving half a league, half a league, half a league onward, it is small wonder that the GOP contest has become so active. The most interesting recent development has been the reappearance of Nelson Rockefeller, who, as it seems, had rather prematurely announced his retirement from presidential politics. Rocky has been firmly supporting the candidacy of George Romney. He has backed up this position by providing staff assistance. The Romney campaign has not been going very well. He mouths off on Vietnam. The Rockefeller campaign has been going very well. He has kept quiet on Vietnam. Which all leads one to speculate on the sort of advice Romney has been getting. Perhaps it is true that he has been brainwashed, but was just incorrect in identifying his laundryman.

□

ROCKY WHITMAN, OF Baltimore, noted this strongly militant statement from the Most Rev. Robert E. Lucey, Archbishop of San Antonio, Tex.: "It is necessary to use force, and the man who doesn't believe in force will soon be a slave." The only problem is that the Christian gentleman wasn't addressing himself to Negroes living in the ghetto; he was talking about Vietnam.

□

THIS MONTH:

What They're Doing to Bourbon
Manny Ress the Button King
Thomas Whitbread: To M. B. Tolson
Three Poems by A. J. Hovde

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Bourbon Flavored Vodka

BY JAMES STERBA

NOTHING the WCTU might do, short of discovering that alcohol causes more chromosome break-up than does LSD, can change the fact that this country runs on booze. Whether that sleepy organization, filled with sleepy old ladies--some of whom wear sneakers--likes it or not, booze not only lubricates the government, it pays congressional salaries as well.

Last year, the nation's spirit makers paid federal, state and local governments roughly $2.7 billion in taxes and fees. The industry and its workers shelled out another $900 million in income taxes. Americans spent around $14 billion for booze in 1966.

Of all the spirits, whisky is tops. It is as American as apple pie, grandmother and violence. This country was founded on it--whisky and furs were the safest exchange during the Revolutionary War when paper money was worth a nickel per dollar. Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton helped pay for the war by taxing it. The Whisky Rebellion--perhaps our first national riot--resulted from the levy. Today's riots run on it. In 1794, President George Washington, in a show of federal strength, dispatched 13,000 troops to western Pennsylvania to put down the rebellion. (Detroit this year got only about 7000.)

Domestic whisky makes up over half of the 309 million gallons of booze Americans guzzled last year. As usual, they didn't know what they were drinking.

American whisky, like the whooping crane, is threatening to become extinct. If the country's major distillers get their way, traditional whisky will not only die, it will drag into its grave the oldest trade union in the country--the Coopers International Union of North America. The union makes the new charred white oak barrels that distillers must use to store their whiskies if they want to call them "straight" and claim age on the bottle.

Recently, however, the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax Division of the Internal Revenue Service heard petitions from the major distillers which, if approved, would change all that. American, Schenley, Seagrams, Grosscurth and Publicker, all major whisky makers, want to alter the labeling and content requirements, and in the process eliminate forever the label as an in-

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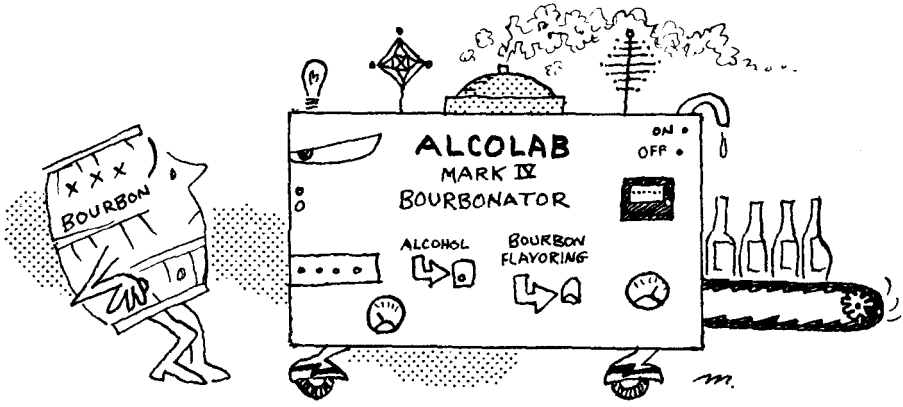
formational tool for determining what's inside their bottles.

At present, in order to call their product "straight bourbon" it must be: made from a mash that is at least 51 percent corn; distilled at no more than 160 proof (200 proof is pure alcohol); and stored in new charred white oak barrels for at least two years. The petitions call for distilling at 190 proof and aging in old barrels. The government says they can use old barrels if their labels read: "Stored X years in re-used cooperage." On Madison Avenue, however, where distillers spend a sizable chunk, the words "re-used cooperage" are commercial suicide, they say. Why not "Aged in mellow seasoned casks," they ask. Government chemists have long held that in old barrels, the chemical reactions simply do not provide the traditional heavy-bodies flavor of American bourbon, and thus to call the product bourbon would be deception.

But, the distillers argue, America's taste for whisky is changing. People want it "light" and "soft," just like the kind that is imported from Canada and England and Scotland, where the distillers can get away with putting just about anything on their labels. They can and do use old barrels--sold to them by American whisky makers. What is happening, the Americans claim, is that imports are cutting into their share of the U. S. market--24% worth last year. If we could only make a similar light whisky, call it bourbon (because the name sells), and even make it taste like bourbon, we can get back our share of the market, say the domestic distillers.

Ernest D. Higdon, president of the Coopers Union, claims most of his 3,200 man organization and some 35,000 persons who depend on the barrel industry (over 95 percent of the 2 1/2 million barrels made last year went to distillers for aging whisky) will be out of work. One reason, he says, is that his men make good barrels that can be used over and over again for several decades.

The union, regardless of its long tradition of sprinkling photos of friendly congressmen and senators throughout its official journal (Russell Long is on the cover of the latest), is fighting for its life without the one weapon it takes these days to stay alive--money. They complain that the distillers are always dropping off fifths on the Hill and treating newsfolk to samples. The



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Bourbon Institute staged a little reception at the National Press Club this month.

In September, in order to solve the distillers' problems, the Coopers Union scurried up to the Hill and had a friend, Senator Vance Hartke, introduce a bill which would require Canadian and Scotch whisky makers to meet the same labelling requirements American distillers do if they want to import their products.

Ironically, it seemed to some, the American distillers cried shame.

"Don't make them lower themselves to our outdated standards," said one industry spokesman. It just so happens that major American whisky companies own large chunks of firms which import Scotch and Canadian whisky. The Coopers reminded everyone that the Justice Department filed suit in April 1966 to force Schenley to sell its 52.7 percent of the Buckingham Corporation, the leading importer of Scotch whisky.

As far as Americans' changing tastes are concerned, the distillers are naturally convinced that their million spent on advertising slogans like "We try softer" have nothing to do with what must be simply mutant taste buds. They deny that the millions of gallons of so-called "light" whisky they have stored around the country has anything to do with their petitions to change the labels.

The distillers stand to save hundreds of millions of dollars by using old barrels. Their product will have a Madison Avenue name label with the word "bourbon" to insure sales. Before water is added to lower the proof, 51 percent of it will be mash distilled at around 190 proof (almost pure alcohol), and 49 percent will be neutral spirits (also pure alcohol).

"They'll be able to make that junk, adding a little flavoring and coloring for 6 cents a gallon," claims Fred Bridges, lobbyist for the Coopers.

But Mr. Bridges is obviously being somewhat harsh. It certainly won't be junk. It will still have to be aged at least two years, regardless of the fact that aging 190 proof spirits in old barrels does absolutely nothing to the contents.

"Junk" is surely the wrong name. Why not:

"Fine mellowed bourbon-flavored vodka, aged X years in mellow seasoned casks while the public wasn't watching."

□

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6. Hygenic Order in America

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The Corner Aphorist

By Sam A. Darcy

■THE PRESIDENT BROUGHT a grandson into the world. That is a blessing. What, however, do you call his sending tens of thousands of other people's grandsons out of this world?

■COUSIN BARNEGAT WAS in to report that a man named Gicker, (this is true), enraged because the University of Pennsylvania student newspaper criticized some school policy, phoned to say that he cut the school out of his will for $250,000. He created a sensation in Philadelphia newspapers. The administration panicked and arranged to take him to lunch.

No proof has been presented that Mr. Gicker has $250 grand. Even if he has, he is only 58 and might live to 90. If he pulled this gag only once a year he could get 32 free lunches, besides inventing non-existent pressures for his Rightist hates. Maybe by the time he dies he will have spent all his money.

Barnegat wants this colum to say that he would gladly accept a free lunch from the following whom he's cutting out of his will for one million dollars each.

> Bob Considine--for gloating in the press that we are killing 13,00 North and South Vietnamese monthly.
>
> Every War hawk in leading government circles who cries for more blood shedding, not one of whose sons is at the scene of battle.
>
> Senator Dirksen who talks like a grave-digger in a cemetery at midnight and often acts like one.
>
> The Negro writer LeRoy Jones who says he hates all whites -- in dirty language yet.
>
> The Russians and Chinese for fighting each other, increasing turmoil in the world to no good purpose.
>
> A certain New Jersey barber named Dom, who offered B. a 12¢ refund on his haircut because he hasn't hair enough for the full price.

"I can't go for more", Mr. B. says. "I only get $68.75 a month pension. If they reform and I have to put them back in my willI have a problem."

■FROM OUR FAVORITE JOURNAL, (9/6/67): (Special to the N. Y. Times)

> Baldwin, L. I., Sept. 5- A second girl student at Baldwin High School testified at a public hearing today that she had been molested by Maurice C. McNeill, the 3-year-old biology teacher.

Not only "special", precocious too!

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HUGH HAYNIE ...

"ALL GOD'S CHILLUN GOT WINGS"

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■ FROM OUR CORRESPONDENCE:

J. E. D., Boston: Definition of Life: Just one damned thing after another.

Definition of Love: Just two damned things after each other.

Sigrid Tanner, Berkeley, Calif. culled this definition from a book: Diplomacy is the art of saying something when you have nothing to say, or of saying nothing when you have something to say.

■ THE PROMISE THAT was America is being drowned in a frightful blood bath in Vietnam, ordered by LBJ, sanctioned by Congressional appropriations, the rising tide of popular opposition notwithstanding. It reminds us of an old limerick:

God's plan made a hopeful
beginning,
But man spoiled his chances
by sinning,
We trust that the story
Will end in God's glory,
But, at present, the other
side's winning.

■ OUR STATE DEPT.-Pentagon diplomacy is based on the theory that you can achieve peace with your neighbor by first physically beating him into submission.

Would you like to try that on your neighbor?

There are cemeteries around the world filled with great and small, which are mute testimony to the foolishness of this idea.

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The McDowell Papers

By Charles McDowell Jr.

POLITICS will not be as much fun now that Manny Ress is gone.

He called himself "The Button King" and "The Sloganeer Without a Peer," but Manny was too modest. He was the Shakespeare of the political campaign button. He dominated his profession so completely that he had a real impact on the culture and political history of his time.

Emanuel Ress died recently at a New York hospital. The New York Times accomplished two things in publishing his obituary. It gave him the lead position on the page, a column of type and a picture, all of which finally put Manny in proper perspective, and it published his age, 59.

He was one of those balding, fast-talking, hustling but harried-looking men who could have been any age between 40 and 70, but he made a game of not telling you. Last time I saw him, in 1965, I asked him how old he was.

"Over 50, going like 60, trying to keep alive in '65," he said.

Manny had come to Washington to mingle with politicians, find out what they were talking about and become inspired with ideas for campaign buttons.

"I like to keep my ear in gear without too much strain on the brain," he said. "Levity with brevity, that's our game. My claim to fame is a lip for the quip."

That is the way Manny talked.

After attending Columbia University, this talking man from Brooklyn was working in Wall Street when his boss asked him to lend a hand to Wendell Willkie's campaign for the presidency in 1940. His main contribution was two slogans for campaign buttons: "Win With Willkie" and "Eleanor, Start Packing--the Willkies Are Coming."

When he finished a subsequent stint in the Army, Manny started a company to make campaign buttons. He estimated that he had sold 500 million of them in his time.

Manny invented dozens of slogans, and he began to talk and, he insisted, dream in slogans. In 1947, when there was some talk of drafting Gen. Eisenhower for President, Manny struck off his simple masterpiece: "I Like Ike."

Irving Berlin wrote a letter to him giving him credit for the phrase that was incorporated in Berlin's famous lyric in 1950. By 1952, when Eisenhower did run for president, Manny's phrase was the key to the campaign.

Although Manny did not originate

(Please turn to page 10)

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M. B. TOLSON wrote Harlem Gallery. He thought of this approximately 180-page poem, segmented, with arbitrage and art, under the letters of the Greek alphabet, as a prelude to his main work, a four or five book poem of the history, or the hysteric story, of the Negro in America. To write those books, that poem, is now for others.

Several times, in my brief knowing him, he told his delight at becoming Poet Laureate of Liberia. A friend asked M. B. how he'd like to be such a thing. He said he hadn't given it thought. Friend told President he needed a Poet Laureate. So M. B. went first class--once out of these United States, he took care to point out--to his installation. He pronounced Louisiana "Lousy Anna."

On a half-hour TV show in Oklahoma City, M. B. anecdotalized, held forth, read the Satchmo portion of Harlem Gallery magnificently. Near the end of the half-hour, having thought me a strait-laced, buttoned-up Texas-Ivy type, the m. c. asked me a question, which I answered by reading my poem, "Glutton." M. B. was delighted, and advised me after never again to wait so long before letting my worth show. His skin being black, the usual idiom had too long been the only road to others' attentiveness.

Clif and Gwynne Warren, then of Central State College, Edmond, now of Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, introduced me to M. B. in 1965. To them I now say more thanks. We know with what humor Tolson said things vilely are.

--(T. W.)

In Praise of M.B. Tolson

M. B. Tolson is dead.
The writer of Harlem Gallery is dead.
He was sixty-six.
He should have lived longer.

He should have lived long as Stevens, Verdi, Chaplin.
He excluded nothing, nobody,
Except the repeatedly vain, repeatedly foolish,
And told them, excluding them, how to know better.

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He loved life so much
That knowing him was almost to be his cancer,
Devouring him.
He and words were twins, at one.

In one of his favorite anecdotes
He told of a train delayedly stopping, a Frenchman getting off,
The Frenchman seeing his twelve-year-old paintings, the Frenchman asking him to come to Paris,
His mother barrring the door for over a week thereafter.

That was how, he said, he turned to poetry.
He turned to it with great vengeance. He wrote words
He could say with tremendous power
And accuracy.

I remember Tolson, two summers ago,
Throwing a half-eaten MacDonalds' hamburger, in its paper, out the window
Of a moving car
And later describing that hamburger as white America.

And I remember M. B.,
The last time I talked with him, on the telephone,
Telling me to come see him,
Wherever, whenever,

At an impossibly imprecise time and place,
As if he knew his poems and life would soon end together
And he would not do all he wanted to do
And he wanted to talk about it: he wanted to talk.

He wanted to write the poem
of negritude, the poem
Of human beings, happenstancedly black,
Of human beings.

Praise to Tolson now: he did
Less than he would, but more than at one
Time he may have thought he could do.
He was a poet.

--Thomas Whitbread.

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(MCDOWELL CONT'D)

all the slogans he used, his ear in gear recognized the good ones early, and his button works was famous for stamping out the merchandise ahead of his competitors.

He always came to national political conventions several days before the formal session began, and he moved through the hotels and press headquaters talking, listening and telephoning the button works with ideas.

He was first with "We Need Adlai Badly." He was first with "All the Way With LBJ" in 1960. When Lyndon Johnson settled for the vice presidential nomination, Manny was ready with "Half the Way With LBJ."

He made a "Stop Stassen" for the Dewey people in 1948, and took progressively greater delight in promoting the same button in 1952, 1956, 1960 and 1964. His estate no doubt includes some more of them for 1968.

He had mild commercial success but great fun with buttons saying "Who But Hubert?" "Who Else But Nelse?" "Stop Khrushchev," "I'm a Moderate Extremist," "Extremism in the Pursuit of Vice is no Virtue," "Help Stamp Out Huntley-Brinkley," and "Support Mental Health --or I'll Kill You."

Manny never brought himself to take politicians, or himself, seriously. He admitted that some of his slogans were good only in the sense that a really good pun has to be bad. The funny buttons, of course, were come-ons for the standard buttons that campaign managers bought by the millions, but Manny was so interested in funny political buttons that he usually forgot to get out of catalogues of his standard ones.

When the political clans gather next summer, it will be an unhappy thing to realize that Manny Ress is not there, stalking the corridors, talking, listening and wearing his personal button: "I Don't Care Who Wins - My Business Is Buttons."

(Richmond Times-Dispatch)

CITY STUBBLE

I sit here in this disheveled lot,
where planning commissions vacated blocks
of old domiciles and heirlooms.
I sit here in quietude, until darkness
comes and covers me with stars or crown.
I sit in silent protest of machines and tandems;
though I sit alone, my diadem is ragweed,
and my sunset is the bloodshot-eye
of the universe. The fallen tree is bowing
at my feet in reverence to neons blushing;
motors are grovelling by the city-stubble,
this disheveled lot razed for parking.

Paul Mariah

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Three Poems

CHECK AND MATE

The day was sad,
My wife was mad,
I felt the strain and stress.
"So how about, "
I shouted out,
"A snappy game of chess?"

Invective flew
And I withdrew
My lesson learned too late:
I can checkmate
My opponent but
I cannot check my mate.

MY WIFE BIT ME

My wife bit me,
Nipping my neck
With teeth that left
Their marks
And made me think
Of death and fiery fear
And passions primitive.
I felt the searing pain
Of love's demand --
And bit her back.

MYTH MIGHTY MOUSE

He must have been quite a boy
That Hercules,
A good farmhand,
Snake killer from the start,
Poacher of orchards and girdles
And a huntsman
Par excellence
Be it lions or horses.

Who knows
What the kid
Might have done
In our own time?

Fifty pushups? The handstands?
Speleology?
Imagine this guy
On a rope
In the Kentucky caverns,
Riding the surf
Or the snowy slopes,
Stinging wind in the nostrils.

Better than Hickok
Or Buffalo Bill,
Better than Bunyan
With his blue ox.

Good and great, buddy,
Good and great.
The lions had real teeth
In those days;
The hydra
Couldn't be clobbered
With a spray gun.

--A. J. HOVDE

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NEAR CHECKPOINT

Would I be rude, Trudy,
Were I to conclude
From your accent
That you've spent
Years waiting, brooding?

Would I intrude, Trudy,
Or be thought lewd
If I saw a hint,
A let's forget glint
That is me including?

George Ellis

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